

Albanian Language

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Abstract

The Albanian Language is an Indo-European Language which is considered by the majority of linguists to be the direct successor of the ancient Illyrian. The origin place of the Albanian Language is supposed to be the place where currently the Albanians live and perhaps farther North. There is no doubt at all as Dardania or the present Kosova is the place where the Albanian or Proto Albanian Language has been spoken continuously until these days. The Albanian Language has two main dialects – the Northern dialect or the so called Gheg and the Southern dialect or the so called Tosk which are also subdivided into transitional dialects. The dialects differ mainly by phonetic but there are also some slight dialectal differences. Nevertheless, these dialects are mutually intelligible. The first known document in Albanian is the “Baptism Formula” recorded in 1462 by Pal Engjëlli (Paulus Angelus). The Albanian Language has undergone two official standardizations. First in 1920 at the Education Congress of Lushnje it was decided that the language of Elbasan meaning Northern Gheg to become official Albanian Language whereas in 1972 at the Congress of Albanian Orthography was definitely decided that the Tosk is to become standardized.

Today, the Albanian Language is spoken by more than 7 million Albanians in Albania, Kosova, Western Macedonia and parts of Southern Montenegro. The Arvanit dialects in Northern Greece do not exist anymore but there are some other types of Albanian which are spoken in Southern Italy more exactly in Sicilia and Calabria in Zara- Dalmatia in Croatia in some villages of Ukraine and in Mandrice of Bulgaria.

There are millions of Albanians from Kosovo and Macedonia living in Turkey who emigrated there, during the Second World War.

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The Indo-European of the Albanian Language

When Franz Bopp in the middle of the XIX century proved that the Albanian Language is an Indo-European Language, there were controversial opinions concerning the origin and place of the Albanian. But Bob and later on Pedersen, Meyer, Jokl and Hamp proved by using different methods of linguistic, etymology of words of the present Albanian Language and studies of old Albanian documents confirmed definitely that the Albanian was one among the Indo-European Languages. This is proved by the grammatical system of the Albanian and by a series of changes of phonetic rules which underwent the today's Albanian and which prove a mutual genesis of these words with those proved to be of Indo-European origin. The contradictions concerning the Albanian could result from the lack of written documents in Albanian.

Nevertheless, the Indo-European origin of the Albanian is no longer a matter of discussion as it was proven just by its origin. "Shortly after the establishment of the Historical and Comparative Linguistics, mainly owing to Franz Bopp in the last century, it was confirmed that the Albanian belongs to the Indo-European language family",¹ wrote Eqrem Çabej, an Albanian linguist who established the Historic Linguistics later followed by Selman Riza, Idriz Ajeti, Besim Bokshi, Shaban Demiraj, Rexhep Ismajli etc.

In the meantime, Eric Hamp an American Balkan expert wrote in an article "Encyclopedia Britannica" in 1974, "the Albanian is an Indo-European Language which is spoken by 2

¹ Eqrem Çabej, *Studime gjuhësore V*, Rilindja, Prishtinë, 1975.

million and 500 thousand inhabitants in the Adrian East Coast of Albania as well as in Yugoslavia but above all in Kosovo and Macedonia, in Northern Leskovac until the Lake of Ohrid".² The details concerning the similarities of the Albanian with other Indo-European Languages were studied by Bopp and Meyer and further specifications were made later by Pedersen and Jokl. But there were also many polemics at the end of XIX century concerning the Albanian and the most known are those between Meyer and Weigandt who denied the Indo-European origin of the Albanian Language. The famous assertions "the twelve theses of Weigandt"³ concerning the origin of the Albanian and the place of birth of this language were defeated by Meyer, an Austrian linguist who studied the etymology of the Albanian words but also by Pedersen and above all by Hahn. But Meyer was also opposed by Pedersen in an article of 1917 for the journal "Morning Star" as Meyer said that the majority of words of the Albanian dictionary were borrowed and just 400 from 5140 words were originally Indo-European. Pedersen was of the opinion that each language borrows words from any other language but has also its own dictionary fund. By opposing Meyer and any other linguist, the Dane Pedersen says that *first of all, let me say that the Albanian Language is a specific one, the similarities it has with the Slavish or Greek one are comparable to the similarities with the Dane or Persian Language*.⁴

By all means, it is true that the today's Albanian has influences from other languages especially from the neighboring ones. However, it is quite naturally when taking into consideration the Balkan history and its ethnic configuration. On the other hand, it is quite clear that the Albanian has adopted just little or some grammatical features from other languages. The Albanian Language has used its own grammatical and syntactic elements to form the language and meet the needs of the society.

² Eric P. Hamp, *Studime krahasuese për shqipen*, ASHAK, Prishtinë, 2007.

³ Balkan-Archiv III (1927) 27-251 (according to Çabej, op. cit.).

⁴ Prof Holger Pedersen, on "The Albanian language", *Ylli i Mëngjezit*, (cited from: Holger Pedersen, *Studime për shqipen*, ASHAK, Prishtinë, 2003).

This or a part of this development of the language which explains at the same time the Indo-European origin of the Albanian but also some similarities with the Balkan languages are explained more detailed by Besim Bokshi by means of his long studies: *The structure of verb order in Albanian* (1971), *Position of articles in Balkan languages* (1980) and *The way of building the nominative flexion in the Albanian Language* (1984).⁵

Nevertheless, the wrong assumptions concerning the Albanian Language and loanwords from other languages were rectified by Eric Hamp, *Because of the superficial changes of the language phonetics for 2000 years and because of loanwords from neighboring cultures, the continuity of the Indo-European heritage of the Albanian Language has been disregarded*.⁶

However, now as the Indo-European origin of the Albanian is not considered of being in the serious linguistic circles, one speaks and has also spoken in the past about possible relations of the Albanian with other languages. Linguists like Bartoli and Jokl hold the thesis of the affinity between the Albanian and Baltic whereas Pedersen has stressed in his former articles the affinity between the Albanian and the Armenian. Nevertheless such assertions seemed not to consider the fact that certain words or forms of the ancient Indo-European might be stagnated during a certain period of time when because of the sociolinguistic environment for example, there were no reason to meet the needs of the language and have not been coped with certain historic linguistic processes. Later, according to Eric Hamp, Jokl has found similarities between the Albanian and the Celtic whereas Weigandt said that there is a keen relation between the Albanian and the Thracian. Other linguists just assumed that the Albanian was the successor of the ancient Illyrian and Hamp⁷ considers these assertions to be serious. Nowadays, the Albanian is proved to be the successor of the ancient Illyrian which cannot be argued by documents but by

⁵ These Works were published many times.

⁶ Eric P. Hamp, *Studime krahasuese për shqipëri*, ASHAK Prishtinë, 2007, f.103 (published for the first times in *Encyclopedia Britannica Inc.*, the Fifth Edition, Helen Hemingwey Benton Publisher, 1974, p. 422-423.).

⁷ Ibid.

means of historic linguistics, archeology, the spreading of the Illyrians which is similar to the today's Albanian's location just by means of the Albanian Language as for example the case of Dalmatia and the Illyrian tribe there, *dalmatët* or *delmatët* their origin can be explained just by the Albanian.

The further argument of Hamp, supported by the Albanian science, is that *the Albanian does not show any special similarity with another Indo-European Language; it is the only modern survived one among its subgroup.*⁸

The name origin of the Albanians

The Albanians, Greeks and Germans may be the only nations which call oneself with another name as are known by other countries. Eqrem Çabej, an Albanian emblematic linguist starts so his work about the national name of the Albanians.⁹ According to him the Albanians belong to a small European group of nations which have two national names, one for the internal use and one which is known by the world.

The Albanians call themselves *Shqiptar-ë*, their country *Shqipëri* and their language *Gjuhë Shqipe*, whereas by the others – country *Albania*, *Albanie*, *Albanien* as a result the inhabitants of this country are called *Albanian*, *Albanais*, *Albaner* etc., as well as their language.

The Albanians called themselves *Arbër / Arbën*, or *Arbëresh / Arb(ë)nesh*, their language *Arbërishte*, and their country *Arbëri* or *Arb(ë)ni*, Çabej says that this national name must have been used by the Albanians until a short time ago as many Albanians out of the Balkans use the old nominations for the language, country and their nationality. For example, the Albanians in South Italia which emigrated there during the XV and XVI century call themselves *Arbëresh*, their language *Arbërishte* and their origin country *Arbëri*. Furthermore, the Albanians which established a colony in Zara of Croatia, call their village *Arbnesh*, even they emigrated there during the first part of the

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Op. cit., Prishtinë, 1988.

XVIII century from the Big Highlands in Northern Albanian zones, nowadays under the government of Montenegro.

The Albanian documents written in the XVI and XVII centuries, name the country also “*Arbënë*”, population *Arbëresh*, *Arbëruer*, and the language *Arbërisht*.¹⁰

All these facts prove that the national name which is used by the Albanians for their country and language has a relative new origin. But, despite the relative new origin it is not clear how the nomination could change so far as well as the new etymology of nomination, the Albanians adopted. The attempts to describe the origin of the new national name of the Albanians were non scientific ones. Çabej, denied in 1972¹¹ all assumptions that there is a correlation between the word Albanian and an eagle which was a symbol in the flag and logo of Skanderbeg and which described almost the whole Albanian history, but according to Çabej the word *shqip*(Albanian) and the word *shqipe* an eagle are two different words and do not have the same origin. He also denies that the new national name derives from the word *skippeto* a Greek word which means *sniper*, he denied also the assumptions that the nomination of the Albanian Language derives from the Latin *excipio*, as according to Çabej this word does not mean *comprehend* but “*exclusion*”.

However, the moment of decision concerning the change of the national name of the Albanians, the origin and meaning of this name and also the fast spreading for the internal use of this name, remain unclear matters for the historic linguistics, sociology and sociolinguistics.

The place of the Albanian Language and Albanians

As true as many things considering the Albanian Language and the Albanians were matter of many discussions and contradictions, mostly because of political motives, the place of

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 69.

¹¹ Eqrem Çabej, “Emrat nacionale të shqiptarëve”, në *Shqipëria e re*, 1/1972, viti XXVI, Tiranë (cited from: *Studime gjuhësore V*, 1988).

its origin and successor were also discussed many times. As was noted by Çabej, the historians while not having enough arguments to prove the locations of different communities and movements of populations as well as the formation of the respective languages, they left this matter to the linguists to discover it by means of their mechanisms of historic linguistics.

With respect to the formation of the Albanian Language and its origin, there have been many discussions concerning its formation by some Albanian linguists and some scientific groups which name various formation places. According to Çabej, with regard to the linguistics history the Albanian is placed somewhere between North and East as the phonetic and grammatical developments lead to that direction. Because of the affiliation of the *satem* and *kentum* group and the fact that the mountains as *Karpatet* can be explained just by the Albanian, he assigns the Albanian to the East whereas the words with e-i rotations as *vret-vrit* are more likely to be Gothic and Latin.

A theory which led to many reactions and not just a scientific debate but accelerated researches by some scientists to hold their theses of Western and North - Western Balkans as the forming place of the Albanian to disprove the twelve theses of Weigandt in favor of their theses. The theses of Weigandt have been refused by Jokl, Ribezzo, Cimochoowski, Mihaescu and Meillet. Çabej refused all theses of Weigandt who assumed that the Albanian derives from the Thracian or Daco-Thracian and was formed in the triangle between Nish- Sofia and Skopje.

Thus, Çabej hold the thesis, with regard to the ethnic and territorial continuity of the Albanians, that they are the successor of the ancient Illyrians. Furthermore, Çabej presented many arguments to prove that the Albanians and their successors lived since the antiquity in the coastal zone. He refused the arguments of Weigandt of having a lack of maritime lexicon in Albanian by presenting the words like *det* and *anije*, which are words of ancient Albanian and are also used nowadays. However, the most radical judgments were done by Eric Hamp, an American linguist, known for the revision of his judgments based on the latest scientific proofs.

He presented his theories concerning the formation place of the Albanian in terms of a summary.¹² "It is clear that during the Middle Ages the Albanian lived more in the North (Jokl, Albaner), as there are many credible arguments which have been written against their spreading until the Adrian Coast: the fact that Scodra (Shkoder) proves a non Albanian origin, there is no proved maritime vocabulary and little Greek words (Jokl); and because of the arguments in favor of the ancient Dardania [...]"¹³.

Despite the comments of many works by different authors, Hamp definitely proved that the Albanian has an Indo-European origin (by supporting the arguments of Bopp in 1845 and the details concerning the similarities of the Albanian with other Indo-European languages by Meyer in 1880 and 1890 as well as those by Pedersen and Jokl). But the most impressing fact is that nobody, during all these discussions for and against the formation place of the Albanian, has states Dardania (Kosovo) as a place where the successors of the Albanians have lived and this has been discussed many times by considering the fact that the name of the place *Dardani* derives from the word *dardhë* (pear). Also the arguments concerning the language of the Albanians in the zones where they have been living also these days are very unclear and politically motivated or have not considered sociolinguistics parameters. So, now it is the task of the sociolinguistics to describe the origin and similarities of the Albanian words with other languages by considering the regulations of the Indo-European languages. In this case, the history itself, by showing the reasons of mass movements of the population, as well as the archeological and anthropological data can be very helpful to get serious and stable conclusions.

¹² Eric P. Hamp, *op. cit.* ASHAK, Prishtinë, 2007, pp. 115-145 (orig. Eric. P. Hamp, *The Position of Albanian*, Henrik Birnbaum/Jaan Puhvel eds., *Ancient Indo European Dialects*, Berkley/ Los Angeles, 1966, pp. 97-121.

¹³ Ibid. pp. 117-118.

Dialects of the Albanian

The Albanian Language has two principal dialects which are geographically divided into two major regions; the Northern dialect or the Gheg and the Southern dialect or the Tosk. About two third of the Albanian speakers are Gheg and the other part Tosk. A very interesting study part for the linguists is that there is a transitional zone of these dialects which is known as the *Transitional Language* which is spoken in the Northern part of the Tosk and respectively in the Southern part of the Gheg, in a certain zone near the *Shkumbin River*.

The main dialects are mutually intelligible and they differ in phonetic, grammar but mainly in morphology. But the differences in syntax are almost negligible. The differences of lexicons are due to the conditions and environment where the speakers of these both dialects have been living. There was a slight change in the field of the lexicon between both administrative political zones which have been separately developed for more then 50 years without any direct communication. The communication between Albania and the Albanians living in Former Yugoslavia, today's Kosovo, Western Macedonia and Eastern Montenegro was a unilateral communication which could not develop any exchange relations. There was even no cultural exchange as the cultural development of Albania's regime, by forbidding mass media, was excluded from the cultural developments outside its borders, thus there was no possibility to get access to the cultural events and language development from there.

First difference is the enhancement of vowels in Gheg in comparison to the Tosk but this is not a really important matter when considering the differences between both dialects of the Albanian Language, wrote Desnickaja.¹⁴

Second difference is the existence of nasal vocals in Gheg which is not a characteristic of Tosk even sometimes the nasality is not really stressed. This nasal-oral feature, according to Desnickaja, forms one of the elements which differentiate the

¹⁴ *Gjuha shqipe dhe dialektet e saj*, Prishtinë, 1972, p. 36.

Albanian dialects whereas Gjinar icites Dilo Sheper who said that there are also some nasal vocals in some places of Eastern Albania such as in Kurvelesh and Himarë but the information at that time did not confirmed that.

In the meantime, Menela Totoni speaks about the phenomenon of nasality heard in a village in the South called Borsh.¹⁵ That means that in the past the nasality existed in both dialects but later on because of changes in the dialects this feature disappeared, so this cannot be the specific difference between both dialects but one of the differences.

As another difference element, Desniskaja mentions the nasal vocal **â** in Gheg which is similar to the **ë** in the Tosk. But Desniskaja says also that the importance of this specification decreases as there is used more an **o** instead. But she does not consider the fact that the importance of the nasal **â** in the Gheg builds the nasality form. This is exactly the feature which changes the meaning of words in Albanian. For example the word *asht* (emër, ashti) – **âsht** (with a nasal **a** which corresponds to the Tosk). Another feature is the nasal vocals in the present form of verbs **zë** and **ziej**. By showing further differences of the so called diphthongs, **ua** (Tosk) – **ue, u** (Gheg) and the reduction of **ë** in the Gheg, Desnickaja considers the rotation as a main feature in the Tosk and not the Gheg. The Rotation in the Albanian is a phenomenon ended in the VII century which affected just the Tosk. This phenomenon led to the transformation of the intervocalic **n** into an **r**.

Jorgj Gjinari mentioned also these specifics in 1966 but he did not put emphasis to any of the elements. But unlike Desnickaja, Gjinari mentioned also another specific element in the field of phonetics between both principal dialects – the accent. According to him there is the general accent regulation for the Turkish loanwords like: **tenéqe** – tenéqe, **shishe** – shishé, **tenxhére** – tenxheré, **penxhére** – penxheré etc., when in a Turkish word the oxytonic accent is not used we take the Albanian paroxytonic accent.

¹⁵ "E folmja e bregdetit të poshtëm", *Studime Filologjike* I, Tiranë, 1964, p. 136.

But Gjinari has noticed that also in Tosk the words **bòjë**, **séfte** and **òdë** have a paroxytonic accent and on the other hand there are also some Turkish loanwords in Gheg which use an oxytonic accent like: **kalà**, **dynjà**, **sini** etc.¹⁶

With respect to grammar, Desnickaja noticed especially two basic matters. First of all, the infinitive tense in the Gheg is for example, **me hap**, **me luftu** (luftue), and in Tosk it is build differently **dua të luftoj**.

When taking into consideration all these facts, the infinitive forms of the Gheg have been used also in the Tosk in former times, says Desnickaja. She considers this as the main difference between both Albanian dialects. Gjinari also agreed in 1966 and later on¹⁷ with the grammatical differences. He wrote that the main reason for the grammatical differences is caused by the existence of some grammatical forms in the Northern dialect and by the lack of respective forms in the Southern dialect. There is also a lack of possessive pronouns (**e vet**, **e vet**, **të vet**), past tenses (**kam pas vojt** dhe **kisha pas vojt**) and the infinitive **me shkue** followed by differences in the syntax. Other differences may occur by building various forms or using the syntactic of one of them: many masculine nouns which end with an **e**, end in the plural form with an **a** (North) and an **ë** (South) or other forms like: **brina-brirë**, **dembela-dembelë**, **gishta-gishtërinj** etc. Another specification is when seeing the adjectives with feminine endings like **i lamë**, **e lame** in Gheg and **i larë**, **e larë** in Tosk, which are differentiable just by the masculine or feminine articles.¹⁸

Gjinari noticed that the past tense in Gheg is build by using the pronominal **u** whereas in Tosk it is simpler e.g. **u lajsha - lahesha** but there are also some forms in Kosovo which are similar to the Tosk **u lahsha**.¹⁹

¹⁶ "Sprovë për një ndarje dialektore të gjuhës shqipe", *Studime Filologjike*, 4, Tiranë, 1966, p.103.

¹⁷ Jorgji Gjinari, Gjovalin Shkurtaj, *Dialektologjia*, SHBLU, Tiranë, pp. 173-174.

¹⁸ Jorgji Gjinari, art. cit. *Studime Filologjike*, 4, Tiranë, 1966.

¹⁹ Ibid.

When considering the theoretic and practical part of the Albanian dialects we see that there are no major differences between them as stated many times in the past.²⁰

Desnickaja says that, "the differences of the dialect in the past were used as an argument against the national self-determination of the Albanian population which has been dominated by the Ottoman Regime".²¹

Herewith she says that the opinion of Maximillian Lambertz is quite interesting, when saying: "the differences between these two dialects are not too big as was confirmed many times (not at any time based on the linguistic point of view) by the opponents of the Albanian speaking nation".²²

When ignoring the fact that there is a transitional zone in the middle of the North and East, both dialects are nowadays quite similar with respect to phonetic syntax and lexicon just by analyzing them we see slight differences...

Standardization of the Albanian Language

Unlike other European languages, because of historic and sociopolitical circumstances experienced by the Albanians, the Albanian Language underwent a late standardization. Thus also the first documents written in Albanian result from the second part of the XV century, more exactly the first known document in Albanian is the "Baptism Formula" recorded in 1462 by Pal Engjëlli (Paulus Angelus) a catholic priest, written in the Northern Gheg dialect. Further proofs about Albanian documents were delivered by E. Durham in 1928, who found a document by the French priest Gulielm Adae sent to his superiors saying that: "*Even if the Albanian Language differs completely from the Latin one, the Albanians use many Latin words in their books*". An Albanian historian, Musa Ahmeti affirmed that he found years ago a voluminous book written in the XIII century in the archives of Vatican but that was never proved

²⁰ Agnia Desnickaja, op.cit. p. 40.

²¹ Ibid.

²² M. Lambertz, *Die Mundarten der albanischen Sprache und ihre Erforschung*, p. 124.

completely even Ahmeti presented some parts of it in journals of Kosovo in 2005.

The Attempts to standardize the Albanian were intensified just in the XX century even there were many attempts earlier by some authors to use a Standard Language in literature. So, in the XX century there were finally exact attempts by some intellectuals from the North to standardize the Albanian Language. There are many well known theories concerning the standardization of the language coming from the North (authors from Shkodra) and from the South (A.Xhuvani) but also from the Middle Albania based on the Elbasan language. The idea to standardize the *Elbasanishte* was proposed by Zef Jubani in 1871 by means of his collection of songs published in Trieste. This theory was also supported by Albanian and foreign linguists such as Petersen, Nachtigal, Pekmezi, Gurakuqi and others but also by Faik Konica who had a strange theory, the Tosk should become language of prose and the Gheg language of poetry. The Commission of Literature of Shkoder supported in 1916-1917 the *Elbasanishte* to become the basis of the Standard Language and this was confirmed in the Education Congress of Lushnje in 1920 where the demand occurred to write the school texts in *Elbasanishte*. The arguments for the adoption of the *Elbasanishte* aimed the geographical integration as this zone is situated near both principal dialects and even though it was based on Southern Gheg. Thus, the *Elbasanishte* has become an Official or Standard Language.²³

However, by the changes of the political situation in Albania after the Second World War, by the influences of the Communist Regime and dictatorship of Enver Hoxha, the usage of Tosk was also imposed on official documents as the dictator Enver Hoxha was also from the Tosk speaking region. This politics was later on also followed by some scientists. Yet in 1947 a commission for the composition of orthographic regulations of the Albanian Language was formed, it consisted of Kostaq Cipo, Eqrem Çabej and Aleksandër Xhuvani.²⁴ But

²³ "Mbi dialektin zyrtar", *Fletorja zyrtare*, Tiranë, 21 kallënduer 1923, vjeti II, nr. 3.

²⁴ Fadil Raka, *Historia e shqipes letrare*, Prishtinë, 2004, p. 203.

their composed project which was related to the Elbasanishte and some relations to the Tosk was attacked by some linguists like Simon Shuteriqi. Because of that in 1949 a bigger conference was organized and in 1951 a brochure "The Orthography of the Albanian Language", was published which was focused on the Tosk to become the Standard Albanian Language. The conferences on orthography were held in 1952 (two sessions in Tirana), whereas in Kosovo was founded an authorized commission to deal with the orthography. Later in 1953 another conference took place in Tirana. A further conference on the orthography was held in 1957 in Prishtina. In 1967 the project on the Albanian Orthography, concerning the standardization of the Albanian based on the Tosk, was published and one year later adopted also by the Linguistic Conference in Prishtina.

At the *Congress of Orthography* in 1972 in Tirana, with authoritative representatives from Albania, Kosova, and other countries of former Yugoslavia a resolution concerning the standardization of the Albanian Language was confirmed.

The reason why Kosovo adopted the resolution was the lack of educated linguists at that time and because they did not have any linguistic preparation in the field of sociolinguistics and standardization. In Kosovo a mutual language is not considered as a matter of linguistic or scientific fact but as a matter of identity.²⁵

Nevertheless, the standardization of the Albanian approved in 1972 at the Congress of Orthography came into force during more then three decades and used in schools and as an official language but the Albanian regime at that time differentiated the Standard Language and the various dialects. In Kosovo the standardized language was used just in schools, partly in literature and media, it was never used completely in every aspect of life. There was no reaction at all concerning the standardization of the Tosk which has never undergone a reform to be completely used in certain domains.

²⁵ More detailed see: Rexhep Ismajli, *Gjuhë standarde dhe histori identitetesh*, Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë, Tiranë, 2005.

However, the emancipation of Kosovo and its independence calmed the needs for identity of the Kosovo Albanians to save the Standard Language which they have never adopted completely perhaps also because of the lack of contact to the Albanians in Albania and others from the regions in former Yugoslavia.

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